

- **Belmont Warrant Committee FY08 Meeting Minutes**
- **FINAL**
- **December 10, 2008, 7:30 p.m.**
- **Chenery Middle School Community Room**

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- Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Brusch, Callanan, Epstein, Heigham, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, McLaughlin, Millane, Smith, Widmer; BOS Chair Firenze, School Committee Chair Bowe

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- Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg

- Absent: Member Paolillo

- The meeting was called to order at 7:33 pm by Chair Curtis.

- Chair Curtis began the meeting by stating that the WC will hear from the town and schools about the ways they are dealing with a “no override” budget scenario.

- ***Budget Presentation: Town***

- Town Administrator Younger: The FY10 preliminary budget marks the start of the budget process using dollars that were available last year. This is not a level service budget – it has reductions in it. Local aid continues to be a concerning issue. We are expecting a 5-10% minimum reduction, but will know more at the end of January. Local aid will not be level funded. Member Widmer added that a 10% reduction would be good news, given the global calamity’s impact on the state – and that towns like Belmont could see more than a 10% reduction. He also said that the MMA and Tax Payers Association are pushing further to give local communities authority to make health plan design changes outside of collective bargaining considerations, as well as scaling retiree medical benefits back to fit the actual years of service. This could impact municipalities, but not for FY10.

- Mr. Younger said that all revenue sources are being looked at, then he highlighted the cuts that would need to be made in order to build a budget with current revenue sources. The cuts include the following: purchase only one police cruiser, eliminate part-time cemetery positions, eliminate twice-weekly street sweeping in the business district, eliminate town services for Town Day and Christmas Tree Lighting events, make funding changes at the new senior center, eliminate Sunday library hours and reduce part-time Library hours, eliminate funds for future needs of the Underwood pool, don’t reinstate Youth Services, no longer offer the employee assistance program, retain in-house custodial positions only for town buildings, eliminate the part-time treasury position,

reduce the public works budget, and retain the current hiring freeze. The Capital Budget will be reduced by 20%, down to \$1.75M.

- BOS Chair Firenze asked if there has been any discussion regarding early retirement packages. Town Accountant Hagg replied that the retirement board thinks it's too expensive to do so, due to the full medical benefit obligation until age 65. Member Widmer agreed that this is not cost-effective, but added that the town could eliminate the positions, as opposed to offering early retirement. Chair Curtis requested that Mr. Younger add to this list of reductions the specific dollar amounts.

- ***Budget Presentation: School***

- Dr. Aubin and members of the School Committee approached the WC table to provide their available funded budget. Dr. Aubin noted that the budget is \$2.8M short. The SC is reviewing the reductions advised by the school administrators. The school has to meet required state mandates (ELL and SPED, for example). Therefore, the administration is recommending that 20 certified positions are cut from regular instruction and there will be reductions in supplies, text books, athletics, student activities, library aids, health teachers as well as in staff development. Busing fees will see an increase. There will be reductions in cleaning staff and fringe benefits. We have tried to protect core programs (e.g., the classrooms) but it is very hard to take \$3M out and not touch staff. In answer to Chair Curtis' question, Dr. Aubin replied that each school level will see certified position reductions.

- Member Widmer: To maintain a level service school budget, it would have to increase by 7.3% for FY10. There is no way we can afford increases like that every year. The best we can assume is 4-5%, and as a result, this budget is making major cuts. We must figure out what changes should be made *long term* that would bring down the rate of growth on a permanent basis to 4%. Cuts need to be made with that in mind. The existing paradigm will not work. We must change the assumptions under which we are working. State aid will not be bailing us out, he said. Dr. Aubin added that state mandates, which are extremely costly to schools, must be changed, as well. Millions of dollars are put into state testing mandates, she said.

- BOS Chair Firenze asked: Why are we reducing more teachers than administrators? Dr. Aubin replied that the school department has hitherto lost as many administrators as it can and still run effectively. SC Member Vose added that the school department can't meet the mandates unless administrators can do countless assessments and meet other mandate-related responsibilities. We either meet the requirements, she said, or lose federal money and accreditation. SC Chair Bowe noted that other systems are now cutting back to where Belmont currently is with regard to administrators. Chair Curtis agreed that Belmont is a model for "running lean". He added that this has become a crisis situation with regard to the level of growth and state requirements, and, as such, consolidation should be looked at.

- Dr. Missal said that while the 7.3% growth rate is unsustainable, the SPED mandates are set and no reductions can touch those mandates. SPED is increasing \$800K and is 13% of the school's budget. This is a large "fixed cost" and should be officially noted as a fixed cost right off the top. Member Libensen noted that all the reductions then are impacting regular instruction, while SPED is *increasing* by \$800K. Dr. Aubin confirmed this and added that as class sizes increase, more kids will end up in SPED. It is a vicious cycle, she said. Assistant Town Administrator Conti noted that state mandates for the town exist too and that it would be difficult to work the SPED amounts into fixed costs because the number changes from year to year.

- Member Hofmann suggested that our state legislatures get educated on the issue of state mandates and their impact on municipalities. The education process needs to start now. SC Member Walker encouraged a continuous stream of emails, calls, and letters.

WC Budget Calendar

- Chair Curtis: The WC will meet each Wednesday beginning in January. On January 21st there will be a Community Forum where Town Administrator Younger and Superintendent Aubin will discuss the state of the budgets. Major elected and appointed officials will be there also to present to the TM members and the citizens what the realistic budget scenario is. Member Allison suggested that the WC give thought and consideration to making this meeting useful and meaningful. Chair Curtis agreed that the structure ought to be well thought-out in order for the meeting to work well. Member Brusch added that the WC needs to address an effective means for notifying TM members and the community about the January 21st forum. We should be prepared to discuss that on Jan. 7, she said.

- BOS Chair Firenze added that the BOS will give thought to the possibility of eliminating positions. We would like to be on the same page as the WC, he added.

- Town Administrator Younger noted that the phone system and/or email list-serves could be utilized for the January 21st notification.

Minutes of 11/19/2008

- The minutes of 11/19/08 were postponed until the next meeting, on January 7, 2009.

- Member Heigham moved that the WC adjourn at 9:12 pm.

- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary